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Cultivated Blueberries — Actual Size

Cultivated Blueberries

The Most Promising Development
in Commercial Fruit Growing
of the Century

Dr. Keefe's Blueberry Plantations, Inc.
Grand Junction, Michigan



"Over Your Head in Blueberries"
A Harvesting Scene at Dr. Keefe's Blueberry Plantation

Cultivated Blueberries

In the early colonial days and until the opening of the present century, wild blueberries were very plentiful and greatly prized by the early settlers and the Indians. During the past 30 years there has been a gradual reduction in the supply of wild blueberries. This has been due to the clearing of many areas occupied by these plants and using the land for other purposes. Competing trees and shrubs have also crowded out blueberry plants in many places. Consequently there is an inadequate supply of blueberries at present with correspondingly high prices. This condition is likely to prevail for many years.

Soil Requirements

Blueberries require a soil that is very acid and well supplied with moisture. Generally soils of a sand or peat nature are considered best, although the blueberry plant will grow well where some clay is present, if it is not predominant and is acid. Clay soils frequently are not acid. A water table 14 to 22 inches below the surface has been found most satisfactory.

Climatic Requirements

Blueberries can be divided into two general classes, highbush and lowbush. The highbush is the only one with which much improvement work has been done. It is found growing naturally in Michigan about as far north as Saginaw Bay; in central and southern New York; in southern New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine. It is also found generally where the soil is suitable in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and in places as far south as North Carolina. There are also some highbush blueberry plants being grown in the vicinity of Puget Sound in Washington. Undoubtedly there are other places where climatic conditions will permit the growth of the highbush blueberry provided soil conditions are suitable.

Locations and Sites

For commercial culture the plantation should be located where pickers may be obtained and where markets are within a reasonable distance over good roads. Pockets or "kettle-holes" should be avoided, due to danger from frost. Large open areas are freer from this danger.

Varieties

A number of very good varieties of improved blueberries are now available. These ripen in succession so that fruit is harvested over a period of from six to seven weeks. Following are brief variety notes:

JUNE This is the earliest of the named varieties. It is comparatively new but shows considerable promise. It ripens its berries together to such an extent that they are usually harvested in two pickings. The size and quality are good.

CABOT The bush is low and spreading, while the fruit is large and of excellent quality. Ripens early and is a good variety of this season where winter cold and frost are not too severe.

ADAMS While the fruit produced by this variety is not quite as large and attractive as Cabot, the bush is much larger, more upright, and more productive. It is a good commercial variety.

PIONEER Matures 10 days to two weeks after Cabot. The bush is spreading, fairly vigorous, hardy, and productive. The fruit is large, attractive in appearance, and of excellent quality. A very good midseason variety.

CONCORD Matures about with Pioneer and resembles that variety to some extent. The fruit is large and of good quality. It is one of the newer varieties and therefore is not as well known as some others.

RUBEL Ripens about two weeks later than Cabot. Makes a vigorous, upright bush that is very productive. The berries are large, light blue, attractive and of good quality if allowed to mature properly. The berry is very firm and therefore an excellent shipper. Most widely grown midseason to late variety.

RANCOCAS Matures with Rubel or a little earlier. The bush is vigorous, upright, and productive. The fruit is large, light blue, and of good quality. This is a promising new variety.

JERSEY Matures about with Rubel or a little later. The bush is upright and very vigorous. The fruit is large and very firm. This variety should be an excellent shipper.

HARDING Begins to ripen with Rubel but continues somewhat later. The bush is of medium size and spreading. The berries are medium in size to large, dark in color, and of extra good quality. This variety has shown remarkable ability to withstand extreme drought conditions. It is also apparently hardy to winter cold and spring frosts. Due to lateness and ability to withstand adverse weather conditions it is of considerable value.

Pollination

Recent investigations in Michigan indicate that the standard varieties of blueberries will set fruit satisfactorily if planted alone. However, it is wise to set more than one variety in order to provide for a longer producing season.

Care of Plants When Received

When plants are received they should be planted as soon as possible. In the meantime they should be placed in a shallow trench and the roots well covered with soil. They can be held in this manner for two or three weeks. They can also be held safely for several days in a cool cellar.

Planting Suggestions

Various planting distances have been used for the highbush blueberry. Ten feet by four feet has been a common distance in Michigan. Nine feet by five feet is also a good distance. For home planting, shorter distances can be used. Blueberry plants live many years under normal conditions and for commercial planting should not be crowded.

The plants should be set a little deeper than they were in the nursery. The tops are usually pruned before shipping, but if not they should be reduced one-half.

Cultural Suggestions

Cultivation should be frequent enough to keep down weeds. The blueberry plant is very shallow-rooted and accordingly cultivation should be shallow. As soon as the harvest has been completed a cover crop of oats or oats and buckwheat should be sown.

Highbush blueberry plants in Michigan growing on a soil well supplied with organic matter have not responded to applications of nitrogen. However, applications of superphosphate and sulphate of potash have been very beneficial. A mixture of 350 pounds of superphosphate and 150 pounds of sulphate of potash are recommended for mature plantations on soils well supplied with organic matter. For poorer soils 175 pounds of nitrate of soda per acre should be added. Younger plantations should receive correspondingly smaller amounts.

After the plants are four years old they will require systematic pruning each year if the large size of fruit is to be maintained. This pruning is largely confined to the removal of small wood throughout the plant.

Insects and Diseases

Fortunately insects and diseases have not been sufficiently serious to require a spraying program.



A Six-Year-Old Rubel Bush Carrying About
Six Quarts of Blueberries

Yields and Markets

It requires from 8 to 10 years for the highbush blueberry to reach full bearing. Average yields will vary with the soil and other factors. However, yields of 2,500 to 3,500 quarts per acre should be received from mature plantations on good sites.

At present there is a strong demand for blueberries of the improved varieties at prices ranging from 25 to 60 cents per quart. This demand with very good prices should continue for quite a number of years. As supplies become larger, canning factories and pie manufacturers offer outlets for

very large quantities, especially of the smaller sized berries. The market outlook for cultivated blueberries is excellent.

Additional Information

More complete information on blueberry culture may be obtained from the following sources: South Haven Experiment Station (Michigan State College), South Haven, Michigan; New Jersey Experiment Station, New Brunswick, N. J.; Washington Experiment Station, Pullman, Washington; Massachusetts Experiment Station, Amherst, Massachusetts; U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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